

## WHILE THE MOTHER WORKS

A LOOK AT THE DAY NURSERIES  
OF NEW YORK

BY LILLIE HAMILTON FRENCH

WITH PICTURES BY JESSIE WILLCOX SMITH

**Y**OU may find them everywhere in New York, from One Hundred and Fourth street to Stanton street, sometimes three in as many blocks; and if you will take the trouble of a journey you will discover them to be of every kind and character, from daintily appointed establishments having much of the charm of your own nursery at home, to poor places at best, bearing in every detail the indelible stamp of an ill-nourished charity. I never realized so fully as after one of these journeys the difference that prosperity makes in institutions of an eleemosynary character.

It is to be detected at once in the air of the matron who receives you. When she has a board of rich managers behind her, or the exchequer of a well-to-do church to draw upon, there is that in her manner which is not to be mistaken. It is like the bearing of the happy wife who has never been harassed by anxiety. "All that I have to do is to ask for what I want, and I get it. The children have only the best of everything," one of these matrons said to me; and I realized that she spoke truly when I looked into the happy faces of the children, and at their pretty beds, and into the closets filled with their clothes—linens of every kind, dresses and underwear, and even little coats of quaint and charming fashion, meant for use in the roof garden

when the day is cold. I had noticed the same general characteristic in the charitable institutions of Cuba, where money has been appropriated with a generous hand and working materials have been chosen with a regard only for their fitness. I have never seen a kindergarten more perfectly fitted up than the one for orphan girls on Compostello street in Havana; nor have I ever seen more cheerful service among the teachers, since there was no sense of being hampered by lack of good material with which to work.

The case is sadly altered, however, when a day nursery's board of managers has to economize. The matron may be as conscientious and as kind, and the children as tenderly loved; but everything, even to the matron's manner, betrays the pinched and the troubled. To realize this you have only to look at the way in which the children's food is prepared; at the way in which the bread is broken and put into the galvanized iron cups waiting for the soup. Everything may be scrupulously clean and far better than any child could get at home; but for all that, unless you boast more philosophy than the rest of us, you will doubtless sigh as I did. Involuntarily you will find yourself comparing the prosperous nursery with the one before you; the matron of the one with the matron of the other; wishing, as you made the comparison, that money did



not make so great a difference everywhere in life, and that where questions relating to babies are concerned it need never be considered.

We draw such fine distinctions in these days between philanthropy and charity; we are so scientific about it all, and so careful to prove that the almsgiving of the early church was deleterious in its results, and that to assist our neighbor wisely in this more enlightened age we must go about it in a different way—be sociological, anthropological, and heaven knows what else beside! We insist on looking at every desire to be helpful to our kind from so many points of view—on what it will do for ourselves on the one hand, then on what it will do for our neighbor, without ever confusing the two. We tell so much about it and are so exact and so measured and so statistical, so well equipped in argument, that it is a wonder any generous impulse ever lives to grow up, with so many obstacles and arguments buffeting it at every turn. The wonder certainly is not to be escaped by those who study the "literature" of day nurseries, and especially the character of those adverse opinions which their promoters have had to overcome since Miss Biddle, in 1863, opened in Philadelphia the first crèche in this country.

To me, at any rate, who believe that all nurseries are miniature worlds in which the most important lessons of life are taught, these day nurseries have an incomparable value in the training of men and women to come. I realized this first in the case of a child belonging to an irresponsible,

pleasure-loving, young colored girl who had never, to my knowledge, regarded any duty, even that involved in marriage, as altogether serious until a baby came—one of those compelling notes which Providence sometimes sends to the most trifling. I supposed that the mother would be bene-

fited by the care entailed, but I dreaded to think of the future of the child. However, now that it is four or five years old I have to confess that I know few children better trained. For this the day nursery to which this child was confided while its mother worked has been responsible. It has controlled its games, directed its thoughts, cultivated its speech, taught it good habits, and made it love cleanliness. I know a boy belonging to a woman who had been deserted by her husband, and to whom, had we the ordering of those affairs, few of us would have permitted the custody of any juvenile. The mother's only virtue was a willingness to work for her child's support. The educational advantages of a day nursery to the child of such a mother would be of inestimable value, as I recognized at once. The matron who finally

took this little fellow in charge during the day was a widow with grown daughters. She came from somewhere in the north of Ireland, and always dressed in black, except for a spotless widow's cap, and looked what she proved to be—the very embodiment of all the homely virtues, of neatness, good cheer, and of a kindness which beamed perennially out of her soft gray eyes and radiated through her gentle speech. The daughter who assisted her, educated



Drawn by Jessie Willcox Smith. Half-tone plate engraved by H. C. Merrill

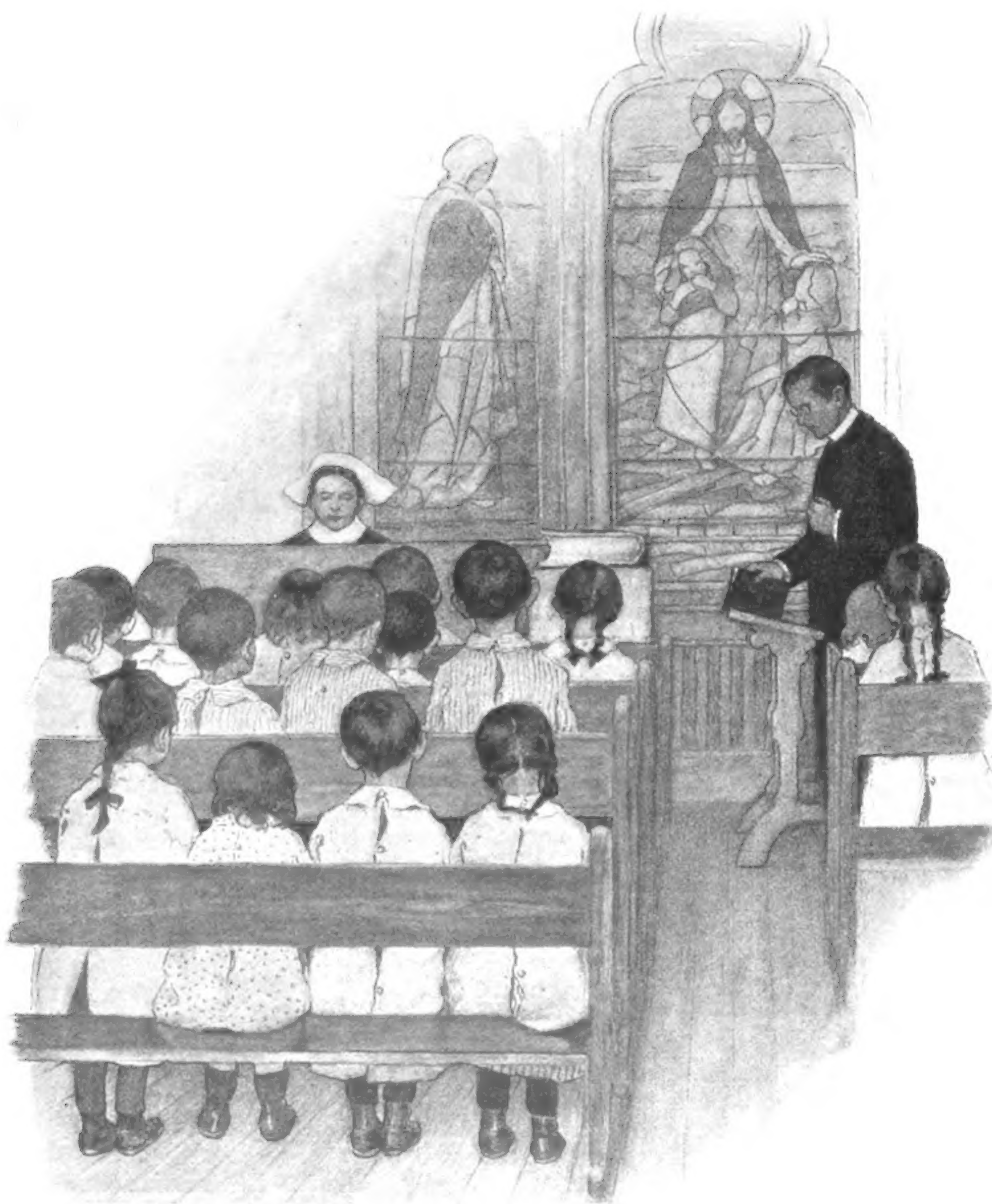
WOMAN WITH BABY



apparently in this country, seemed like a young Madonna. She was playing with the little ones in the back yard when I went there, and made an unforgettable picture, surrounded as she was by a score of children, some of them with the faces of

cherubs, now that they were scrubbed and shining, their heads in order, and their own clothes replaced by those supplied by the managers. Up-stairs in the house the older children were being taught to sew.

There would seem to be, then, no more



SEEKING FOR A NURSERY

Drawn by Jessie Willcox Smith. Half-tone plate engraved by R. C. Collins

CHAPEL OF GRACE CHURCH NURSERY



question about the educational advantages to children taken out of the streets and placed in such environments than about those advantages upon which the State insists for boys and girls of a riper age whom it compels to learn to read and write at school. Indeed, the publications issued by the day nurseries all go to prove (so much have the goodly intentions of their promoters had to battle against) that the anxiety uppermost in the minds of persons questioning the system during its early stages of development was not for the children but for the parents.

"Would not the father and mother be robbed of all sense of responsibility?" was a prevalent question with many interlocutors at that time. "Would not the day nurseries, by relieving mothers of their care, encourage vice and idleness?" "Would they not lead to the breaking up of all home life among the poor?" A French writer who was quoted on the subject says, in speaking of the influence of the *crèche* in France, that "women who had never gone out to work had they not been sure that their children would have been cared for now leave in the mornings with their husbands, work all day, and come home at night, tired and unfit for exertion, to a cold room all in disorder, no fire, no supper, where indeed they meet their husbands and children, but which is home no longer to any of them." Again, a well-known authority on methods of work among the poor of England wrote of "women standing, gossiping or quarreling, dirty and draggled, about door-steps, while we are cooking at school for their children the dinner which they should be preparing each in the tidy home; others going out to work because we are preparing the *crèche* instead of leaving the care of the baby to its mother. Is the family life forgotten, that we seem determined to set up all manner of great institutions with charitable subscriptions, instead of encouraging each member of a family to do his or her work?"

And then, the question of the mother being solved, and it being agreed that to be helped she ought to be worthy, the question of the father came up. "What would the nursery do for him? Would he be encouraged to idleness because his wife labored? Would he become like that father in some factory town who sent all

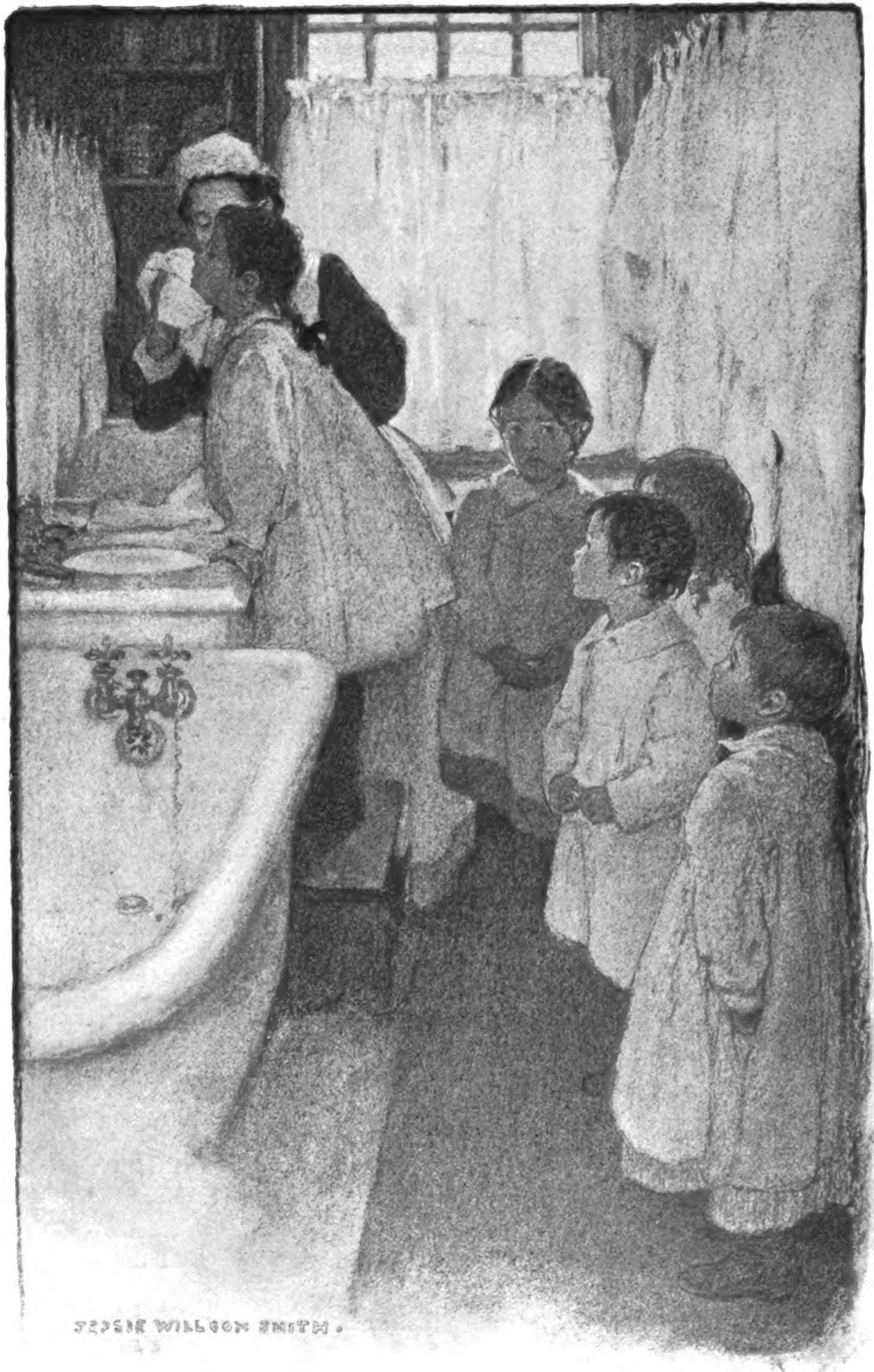
his little boys and girls to work, confining his own labors to the noonday hours when he carried dinner-pails to his children?" Indeed, it would seem as though the father had been regarded as a greater stumbling-block in argument than even the tired and overworked mother, the question of whose relief had to be so stubbornly contested.

"There is one problem connected with this work," says a writer on the subject, "which we have not yet been able to solve, and that is the disposal to a proper place of the worthless, dissipated husbands, who, whenever their wives are disabled and it is impossible for them to go out to work, desert, neglect, and abuse them. As soon as these women become self-supporting, these parasites, if I may call them such, invariably appear to divide the hard-earned wages, without the least intention of lending their aid toward the support of the family; and in many instances where the women were beginning to reap the benefits of our assistance, these discouraging factors would appear to take out all the hope and courage with which these poor women were beginning to be inspired. It seems almost a hopeless wish that some law might be framed to protect these helpless and devoted wives."

In the meantime those who cared for the babies worked on. Men like Jacob Riis argued in favor of the day nursery. "On the dark slum picture," he says, "it makes always a bright spot. It provides the playground the child's life was yearning for in time to pull all the working thought of the child up to the new ideal of beauty, of civilization. It begins at the end where the beginning must be made, and lays the basis for the kindergarten where it must be made for the mother's sake as well as for the child's sake, the home's sake. It makes a home where there was none. I wish there were no poor mothers who had to go out to work, but unhappily there are. They do have to. I hope for a better day that is coming, when mothers with children shall not have to go out to work; when their place shall be at home. In that day we shall need nurseries no longer."

Women like Mrs. C. R. Lowell plead for them. "There is a field for the day nursery," she says, "which it does seem has no danger lurking in it—there are the desolate widows left with the young children to whom they have to be both mother





JESSIE WILLCOX SMITH.

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EIGHT O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING, GRACE CHURCH NURSERY

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and father, and there are the women with sick husbands, upon whom also falls the burden of the family support; and to these hard-pressed and heroic women the day nursery is an unmitigated blessing, giving them a sense of peace, when laboring for their children's support, in the thought that they are safely cared for and enjoying advantages which otherwise they could never know."

Now that time has proved the value of these institutions, we read in one of the latest utterances on the subject: "For the first time in the realm of sociology its students are beginning to take account of the factor 'the day nursery, or crèche,' in connection with the great problem of the disintegration of working-men's families, and they find that it is proving efficient in keeping the families together who are near enough to take advantage of its helpfulness. The aid that the nursery gives is understood by all who have entered intelligently into that work, and is easily comprehended by others when the fact is pointed out that when the man in a family fails to secure employment the woman must become the bread-winner; then arises the problem, Who is to care for the children while the mother is absent? The father may do so for a while, but he is obliged to be out continually seeking employment; or, as is too often the case, he refuses to stay at home to mind the children; or, still worse, he deserts his family in their hour of need. In any case, the mother is forced to go out to work and the children are either locked into a room and left there all day, or are committed to the care of some neighbor, who doubtless does what she can, or are left recklessly to run on the streets. The inevitable result of this condition is that the mother, sick and tired of the anxiety, the trouble, the complaints which come to her on her return, turns to the half-orphan or other asylum or home, and there places her children, from whence, as statistics show, they seldom return, and the family is effectually broken up."

All of these various considerations have influenced the managers of various nurseries. In some no woman known to be disreputable is allowed to leave her children, whatever, alas!



Half-tone plate engraved by C. W. Chadwick  
GOING TO DINNER, CATHARINE MISSION



may be their needs. Most of the day-nursery constitutions read, "For the benefit of working people unable to provide for their children," or "of working mothers: preference given to widows," or "of poor working mothers away from homes." Careful records are kept, and investigations, sometimes with the coöperation of charitable organizations, are made before children can be confided to a matron's care. Moreover, the character of the work done by the mother is carefully considered, to the advantage sometimes of the mother, as in the case of certain women who are dish-washers in restaurants and whose hours are necessarily irregular. The rules of an institution are sometimes broken for their benefit, a child being kept after hours until the mother is able to come for it. Again, in certain manufacturing districts in town, like those on the East Side where cigarettes are made, or like those on the West Side among the silk-mills and box-factories, where women are obliged to make an early report at the factory, the hours of the nursery are also changed for their benefit.

It is not to be supposed that during all these years the day nurseries have been neglected by the Board of Health, that one power of autocratic privilege among us which, when even democracy fails to bring about a reform, steps in and brings the unwary to account. The board has been most vigilant in looking after the nurseries, in making inspections, in limiting the number of children admitted; in requiring iron beds and wire mattresses with blankets over them instead of mattresses of any kind; in enforcing the use of hair pillows when any were used; in insisting upon just so much space about and under each bed, and just so many cubic feet of air for each child in the room; in seeing to it that the outside garments of the children are fumigated daily. When an infectious disease breaks out in the tenements, children from that house are not allowed in the nursery until all danger of contagion is over. If there is no regular physician in daily attendance, one must be within call, and any child showing unusual symptoms or eruptions must be isolated at once until its case can be decided upon.

Cleanliness has been made an absolute rule in all nurseries, some of the managers going so far as to decline a child whose mother has been reprovved for the third time

for bringing her baby dirty. The question of cleanliness, by the way, involves some of the most interesting points in the managers' discussions. Shall a daily bath in the nursery be insisted upon? Shall a child's clothing be changed throughout every day? The settlement of these questions not only involves the nurseries in extra labor, but conflicts with the prejudices and precepts of parents. One child, found at home "sewed up for the winter," said to her visitor: "Don't rip me. Ma will be mad." So widely do domestic customs differ among us.

The pioneer in New York in this line of work was the Virginia Day Nursery. It was so named in 1875 in memory of Miss Virginia Osborn, daughter of the late Mrs. William H. Osborn, who herself will long be remembered gratefully in New York for her wise, noble, and unostentatious charities. Miss Osborn was one of several young women who had planned to execute this admirable idea. The nursery is located at 632 Fifth Street (East), where a new, cheerful, and commodious fireproof building of four stories and basement—a model for such a purpose—was opened in May, 1902. Here, at the nominal charge of five cents a day, children under seven years of age may be left during working hours, receiving two meals (dinner at half-past eleven and supper at five), a physician's supervision, physical care, kindergarten instruction, amusement, and the opportunity for sleep and rest. There are two play-rooms on the roof, one inclosed and one shaded by an awning, and the construction and appointments of the building are in keeping with modern scientific and hygienic requirements. The house has beds and swinging cribs for seventy-five children; three bath-rooms of the latest pattern, rooms for the matron and attendants, an isolation-room for use in illness, dining-rooms, kitchen, laundry, etc. Mothers' meetings, with instruction on sanitary topics and on cooking, sewing, and the care of home and children, are part of the present work, and plans are on foot for an extension of the useful influence of the nursery in the crowded tenement-house section in the vicinity.

The nurseries in New York are supported in almost every instance by voluntary contributions, although one nursery





Drawn by Jessie Willcox Smith. Half-tone plate engraved by F. H. Wellington

BABIES SUNNING IN GRACE CHURCH GARDEN



reports a legacy from some old supporter. The late Mrs. Amory, who some eighteen years ago founded the West Side Day Nursery, a free institution at 266 West Fortieth street, used to raise money at first by printing and selling receipts for sauces, translated from the French, selling also the horse-radish and the flour to be used in making them. She sold pin-cushions too, sent out during one season three thousand five hundred notes, got up concerts, and was so indefatigable in her efforts that she became a proverb among her friends. She began with a couple of rooms on Eighth Avenue and took in two children. This nursery now has an average attendance of thirty-five, that number being all that the Board of Health will allow. A new building is in process of construction. In this institution much stress is laid on industrial training. Girls from seven to sixteen, on payment of ten cents a week, are taught basket-weaving, sewing, and crocheting. This crocheting brings the children a revenue, the work being sold by them among the Germans of the tenements as trimming for pillow-cases and sheets. Much stress is laid on the value of careful habits. If a shoe button is off, it must be sewed on at once; a rip must be mended; the door must be answered properly. And it may be well, just here, to refer to a suggestion, made by some matron, that children trained in the nursery might well be educated to do service as house servants, the training of the kitchen garden, where miniature beds are made and miniature tables set, not quite covering the ends designed. The West Side Day Nursery sends out women as laundresses, washerwomen (there is a difference between them), and cleaners, and provides trained waitresses for dinners and luncheons. Its children must all wear short hair. No colored children are admitted.

The Wayside Day Nursery at 214 East Twentieth street also began some seventeen years ago in two rooms, and is now about to enter a new building of its own. The whole atmosphere of this nursery is one of unquestionable charm. It has an average daily attendance of thirty-nine and a quarter children at five cents a head. It also gives dinners to school children whose mothers are out at work. After school hours and during vacation, industrial classes are held for girls from sixteen

to eighteen years of age. An interesting innovation was made not long since in the cooking classes held for the mothers in their own homes, where eight women are gathered and taught to cook, being taught particularly how to use the materials in the house and the utensils at hand.

The day nursery of Grace Church, which has had the benefit of everything which money and good will could do for it, is under the charge of the housemother, assisted by one of the deaconesses. There are also from ten to twelve nursemaids in charge. The average daily attendance is seventy. The nursery children, trained by a choirmistress, form the choir at the afternoon chantry service. Passers on Broadway may often see these little children, in their pretty caps, playing in the rectory garden. From half-past five to half-past six tea is served to the mothers who come and go. A deaconess is always in attendance. Much volunteer service of an exceptional kind is rendered to the nursery by young women of New York.

Volunteer service is also made part of the obligations of the Order of the Emmanuel Sisters of Personal Service, and at their day nursery young Jewish women of wealth take turns in helping the matron care for the children. This nursery, too, is to move into new quarters now being erected at 318 and 320 East Eighty-second street—a building in which many of the working clubs are to be gathered and where everything is to be planned after that liberal spirit in which the Jews are preëminent in all their charities.

The Halsey Day Nursery at 227 East Fifty-ninth street has been for some years in a building specially constructed for it. The whole atmosphere of this nursery is also of a delightful order, full of cheer and wholesomeness. This nursery is one of the departments of the Helping Hand Association of St. Thomas's Church, which has also an employment society, a diet kitchen, and a maternity society. The average daily attendance of children is between fifty and sixty, representing twenty-two deserted wives. Six nurses are always at work. It has a roof garden, and coats are provided for the children who play there.

The Sunbeam Day Nursery at 1147 First Avenue is carried on by the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in a building having boys' and girls' clubs, a gymnasium, kin-





Drawn by Jessie Willcox Smith. Half-tone plate engraved by J. Tinkey

# THE CRÈCHE, HALSEY NURSERY





Drawn by Jessie Willcox Smith. Half-tone plate engraved by S. G. Putnam

#### IN THE ROOF GARDEN, HALSEY NURSERY

dergarten, and reading-rooms. The children occupy several floors, and have at their disposal a roof garden carefully shaded, and provided with a sand-pile. It has a daily attendance of forty-five. A philanthropic baker contributes fifteen loaves of bread three times a week for the children.

All the virtues, however, are not to be found in those day nurseries which either have new buildings of their own or are moving into those specially prepared for them. Thus the Sunnyside Day Nursery at 231 East One Hundred and Fourth street is in an old house with a pretty garden in the rear and flowers at the windows. Some half-dozen well-trained nursery-maids are in attendance, and a kindergarten is held. The Riverside Day Nursery at 121 West Sixty-third street is also lodged in an old dwelling-house with a pretty back yard and a sand-pile. Some twelve hundred and eight children were received here during one month of the current year. Colored children are admitted, and school

children can come for their dinner. The Bryson Day Nursery at 149 Avenue B is in a dwelling-house overlooking Tompkins Square. The children are under the charge of a housemother. This nursery has a series of beds named by their donors in memory of certain children.

Other New York nurseries are the Bethany, Bethlehem Day Nursery of the Church of the Incarnation, Bloomingdale, Brightside, Catharine Mission, God's Providence, the Jewell, the Lisa, Little Missionary, New York City Mission, Presentation, Pro-Cathedral, St. Agnes's, St. John's, St. Joseph's, St. Vincent de Paul's, Silver Cross, Temple Israel Sisterhood, and the Winifred Day Nursery of the East Side House Settlement.

In an article of this length it is impossible to go into fuller details about the separate nurseries. Certain general characteristics are found in them all. Cleanliness is made a rule even where poverty prevails and but one extra attendant can



be hired. Not only are industrial classes held, but kindergartens are almost everywhere associated with day nurseries; and where, for lack of means, these are not possible, every effort is made toward the establishment of them. In one or two instances only is the influence on the mother more or less ignored by managers and matron, and the neighborly spirit not cultivated. In fact, the outgrowths of the nursery form one of its most interesting features. Mothers' meetings are held; training and work for the mothers are

tions. Summer homes are provided for many of the children, enabling them to escape the awful heat and discomfort of the tenements during a time when even those left in houses up-town find life insupportable. Some nurseries have established summer



Drawn by Jessie Willcox Smith. Half-tone plate engraved by William Miller

#### DINNER-TIME, SUNNYSIDE NURSERY

provided; lectures on hygiene are given. I saw one charming baby belonging to an Italian who had lost several children before the arrival of this one. She points with pride to her wholesome boy and is eager to tell you how, to save it, she has obeyed every one of the doctor's direc-

mer homes of their own, others send their children through some of the various charitable organizations. For all of this the mother is seldom asked to contribute more than five cents a day; and when two or more children are left at the nursery they are admitted for something like two cents a head.



In 1895 the Association of New York City Day Nurseries, of which Mrs. A. M. Dodge is still president, was organized with constitution and by-laws. The object of the association, which meets in April and November, is to benefit by conference the work done by the nurseries, the extension of the work into the needy districts of the city, and the encouragement and development of every feature which shall educate and elevate the beneficiaries. There is, moreover, a Federation of Day Nurseries, of which Mrs. Dodge is also president. Any nursery throughout the United States may join the federation, the purpose of which is to unite in one central body all day nurseries and to endeavor to secure the highest attainable standard of merit.

New York, as the largest city in the



United States, leads, of course, in the number of its day nurseries. Whenever a report is made of some notable improvement in another city, members of the federation do not hesitate to make the journey in order that the best results may be studied.

Some of the day nurseries invite you to visit them at stated hours, but I have never been able to make up my mind when a visit was most delightful — whether

in the hours when the children are playing, or when they are asleep in their cribs or on the mats which are laid on the floors, or when they are engaged in the kindergarten. One regret I have to confess to—that none of them at table make a picture like that to be seen when the Foundlings dine in London, where every visitor makes it a point to go to see them at their midday meal.

## VISTA

BY GEORGE CABOT LODGE

WHERE is the end of the journey we follow, the rest and reward for our travel and tears?

Where shall it fail, in what vistas and vastness, the merciless march of the river of years?  
Oh, when shall we pass from the ways of the woodland, the wall of the hillside, the length of the lea,  
And feel, in the wonder and wind of the sunrise, the void of our vision fill full of the sea?

In the deserts of life we have wearied and wandered, the highways are black with the blood of our feet,  
We have fathomed the fashions of faith that are faithless and tasted the bitter of love and the sweet;  
Where the highlands of hope on the verge of to-morrow are dim with the sunset and dark with the dawn,  
We have pressed in our pitiless pride and our power, and watched for the curtains of death to be drawn.